

Sanitized - Approved For Release : CIA

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Again, the U.S. face is red

CPYRGHT

Once again, the United States widens the credibility gap. Once again, after an early denial, comes admission by Washington that our accusers were right the first time. Seems we did, or might well have, strafed that Russian ship, the *Turkistan*, in the port of Cam Pha.

The most blatant example of the United States' prevarication in international affairs occurred when the U-2 was shot down by the Russians May 1, 1960 and we claimed that it was merely a weather plane that had lost its way. When the Russians finally put the plane and the pilot, Francis Gary Powers, on the record, faces were red all over Washington. The CIA simply had made up a "cover" story and told the lie to President Eisenhower who passed it on to the Russians.

But the term "credibility gap" hadn't even been born then. Now it is part of the language; and nearly every statement having to do with foreign affairs—and many having to do with domestic affairs, too—are looked at up and down and around and about and sideways before people will accept the official words.

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In the case of the Russian ship *Turkistan*, the sequence went like this: The Russians claimed that in bombing raids by U.S. planes, the *Turkistan* had been hit. Not at all, Washington replied; the United States had only two flights of F105 jets in action at Cam Pha that day, and they didn't hit the Russian. Maybe, we said, the Russian ship

was hit by North Vietnamese anti-aircraft fire, and since the Russians were said to have provided the anti-aircraft guns, the irony was a pleasant one.

But now, the Pentagon says, word comes from the field telling of a "third flight" that day: "The target of the third flight was a railroad yard at Bac Giang, about 65 miles from Cam Pha. As previously reported, there was no strafing by the aircraft of the first two flights. However, it now appears that there was 20 millimeter suppressive fire against the North Vietnamese anti-aircraft site at Cam Pha by aircraft of the third flight and that some of this fire may have struck the *Turkistan*."

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Now, we know as well as the next one that from the handlers' posts in the cockpit of war—hot or cold—the entries must always be protected as far as is practicable. The Russians, having a closed society, gain the jump on everyone else. Ours, as an open society, is expected to answer and to give truthful answers. This causes difficulties sometimes.

But it seems to us that in the end the truth has an embarrassing way of coming out regardless. Wouldn't it be better to approach the whole subject of answering charges from the viewpoint of saying candidly what happened, if we know? And if we do not know, to say that the Washington department involved will investigate and will reply later on? And in the meantime, say nothing that can be turned against us as an outright lie?